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Trip Report: ICRISAT, Dec 16, 2021

Shilka Chaudhari

Darter (Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

"The birds of hope are everywhere, listen to them sing."
~ Terri Guillemets

At the crack of dawn, on a bleak winter day, a few birding enthusiasts gathered at ICRISAT. This birding spot continues to remain a top favourite and a paradise for all bird watchers. Located in Patancheru, the campus is spread over 3000 acres. The lush green eco-system has been a holy grail for resident and migratory bird species for a long time. Gaining access to this restricted spot is difficult but thanks to Wing Commander Yella Prakash Rao uncle, we got the required authorizations. We were permitted to take our vehicles inside the campus for bird watching, which is usually not allowed. A group of ten members were present for this birding trip.

Green Bee-eater (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

As we started driving around the campus, we spotted a flock of 12-15 Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) feeding in the green field. Further ahead we saw Black Drongos (*Dicrurus macrocercus*), Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*) and a group of Little Cormorants (*Microcarbo niger*) in flight. We reached the first lake and stepped out to photograph River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*) busily fishing for breakfast.

River Tern (Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

White-throated Kingfisher
(Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Barn Swallow (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Meanwhile a White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) perched on top of an electric pole was making a meal of a small fish. We walked down an unpaved road and observed a flock of Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) and Asian Palm Swifts (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*) flying around on top of one of the trees. We also spotted Indian Pond Herons (*Ardeola grayii*) and Purple Herons (*Ardea purpurea*) on the muddy banks of the lake.

Purple Heron (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

A few Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) were perched on the rooftop of a building, and two males were foraging in the nearby fields.

Indian Peafowl (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Paddyfield Pipit (Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

Prakash uncle was busy photographing Paddyfield Pipits (*Anthus rufulus*) flying around. We all noticed a small group of Chestnut-tailed Starlings (*Sturnia malabarica*) in flight. Someone spotted a bird perched in grasslands which, initially, I thought to be a House Sparrow (female). Later, Samuel uncle and Prakash uncle mentioned it was a Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*). We photographed the little bird and verified it in Grimmett's book. Voila – the senior birders were spot on!

Zitting Cisticola (Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

As it started getting warmer, we heard loud calls of Grey Francolins (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) from the banks of the lake but were unable to spot the birds. Loud calls of Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) did not go unobserved. Prakash uncle mentioned he could hear the calls of Blyth's Reed Warblers (*Acrocephalus dumetorum*) from the shrubs close to the lake. He had also noticed a Plain Prinia (*Prinia inornata*) in the same area.

Plain Prinia (Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

Black-winged Stilt
(Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

Walking around and inspecting the second lake, we heard many loud quacking sounds. The lake is surrounded by tall trees and semi dry grasslands. We saw a few Indian Pond Herons basking in the sun on the banks of the lake. There were a few Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) swimming in the lake.

Northern Pintail female (Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

Northern Pintail male (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Spot-billed Duck (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

We noticed Indian Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*), Oriental Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*), Northern Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*) and Gadwall (*Mareca strepera*) in the third lake. We saw Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*), White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*) and a few warblers flying around. Prakash uncle got lucky – he got to photograph the Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*) and a Blyth's Reed Warbler.

Lesser Whitethroat (Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

Blyth's Reed Warbler (Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

We also heard the calls of the Clamorous Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus stentoreus*) and saw an Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*).

We spotted Eurasian Golden Orioles (*Oriolus oriolus*), Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) and Asian Koels (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*). A Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*) sat on a large banyan tree and a lone Intermediate Egret (*Ardea intermedia*) was busy foraging in an open field.

Intermediate Egret (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Black-winged Kite
(Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

Noisy Rufous Treepies (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) created quite a ruckus while flying around amidst the thick, tall trees. We got to see Yellow-billed Babblers (*Turdoides affinis*), Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*), Black-winged Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*), Spotted Dove (*Spilopelia chinensis*), Barn Swallows, Scaly-breasted Munias (*Lonchura punctulata*) and Shikra (*Accipiter badius*). Several Blue-tailed Bee-eaters (*Merops philippinus*) were flying around.

Shikra (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Blue-tailed Bee-eater
(Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

We decided to drive down to the fourth lake. On our way we came to Patancheru Lake and observed a number of waders in and around the lake. A good sighting of a single juvenile Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) was nice.

Greater Flamingo juvenile (Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

The lake was populated with Common Coot (*Fulica atra*), Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*), Grey-headed Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), Intermediate Egret, Black-winged Stilt, Lesser Whistling-duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*) and Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*).

Scaly-breasted Munia (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Pied Bushchat male
(Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

Pied Bushchat female
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

As we continued our drive we observed bird species like Scaly-breasted Munia, Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*), Siberian Stonechat (*Saxicola maurus*) and Green Bee-eater. On our arrival, we noticed colonies of Great Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) on the small island in the middle of the lake. We spotted Darters feeding their young. There was a colony of Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) on one of the islands. We again spotted Rufous Treepies. The local name for the Rufous Treepie is '*taka chor'*. Literally translated, this means 'coin thief'.

Great Cormorant colony (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Black-headed Ibis colony (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

The serene atmosphere of birds flying about, the fresh air, fresh water lakes and lush green surroundings was a welcome change from my daily routine.

Indian Roller (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

We continued our journey towards the final lake. We were surprised to see the lake full of water. We came across Indian Rollers (*Coracias benghalensis*), White-browed Wagtails (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*), Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*) and Common Sandpipers (*Actitis hypoleucos*). We saw Spot-billed Pelicans (*Pelecanus philippensis*), Ruddy Shelducks (*Tadorna ferruginea*) and Red-wattled Lapwings too. A few of the birders had spotted an Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark (*Eremopterix griseus*).

Asian Openbill (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Spot-billed Pelican
(Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

A sumptuous breakfast had been arranged in the campus canteen. After a hearty brunch, Samuel uncle and I photographed some Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) flying around.

Rose-ringed Parakeet (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Red Avadavat (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

I was assigned the task of noting down the list of birds spotted during this trip. The total bird count was 68 species. I sincerely thank Shafaat uncle and Prakash uncle who were instrumental in arranging this birding trip in a short time. It was a memorable one for me.

The group at ICRISAT (Photo courtesy: Shilka Chaudhari)

The full list of birds seen during the trip is given below:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Oriental Honey Buzzard	*Pernis ptilorhynchus*	35	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
2	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	36	Eurasian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus oriolus*
3	Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*	37	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
4	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	38	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*
5	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*	39	Spotted Owlet	*Athene brama*
6	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*	40	Intermediate Egret	*Ardea intermedia*
7	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*	41	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*
8	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*	42	Yellow-billed Babbler	*Turdoides affinis*
9	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	43	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*
10	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*	44	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*
11	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*	45	Spotted Dove	*Spilopelia chinensis*
12	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	46	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*
13	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*	47	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	*Merops philippinus*
14	Chestnut-tailed Starling	*Sturnia malabarica*	48	Common Coot	*Fulica atra*
15	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	49	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*
16	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	50	Grey-headed Swamphen	*Porphyrio porphyrio*
17	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*	51	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*
18	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*	52	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*
19	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	53	Greater Flamingo	*Phoenicopterus roseus*
20	Paddyfield Pipit	*Anthus rufulus*	54	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*
21	Zitting Cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*	55	Red Avadavat	*Amandava amandava*
22	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	56	Bronze-winged Jacana	*Metopidius indicus*
23	Common Hawk Cuckoo	*Hierococcyx varius*	57	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*
24	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	58	Siberian Stonechat	*Saxicola maurus*
25	Gadwall	*Mareca strepera*	59	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*
26	Northern Pintail	*Anas acuta*	60	Green Warbler	*Phyloscopus nitidus*
27	Oriental Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*	61	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*
28	Northern Shoveler	*Spatula clypeata*	62	Asian Openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*
29	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	63	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*
30	Common Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	64	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*
31	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*	65	Spot-billed Pelican	*Pelecanus philippensis*
32	Blyth's Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus dumetorum*	66	Ruddy Shelduck	*Tadorna ferruginea*
33	Clamorous Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus stentoreus*	67	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	*Eremopterix griseus*
34	Lesser Whitethroat	*Sylvia curruca*	68	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*

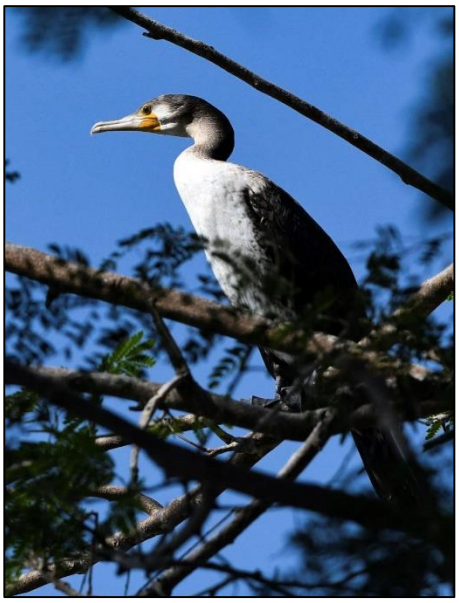
Some other photos taken during the trip:

Psyche (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Common Grass Yellow (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

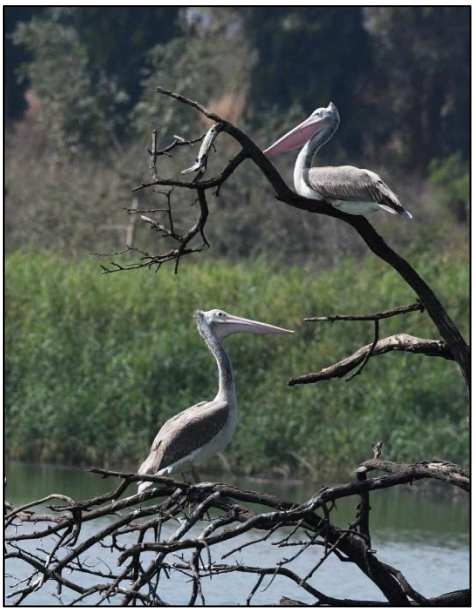
Common Jezebel in flight (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Common Myna (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)



Great Cormorant (Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

Eurasian Marsh Harrier
(Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)



Spot-billed Pelican
(Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

Indian Silverbill (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Ruddy Shelduck, Red-wattled Lapwing & Little Cormorant (Photo: Wg Cdr Yella Prakash Rao)

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Trip Report: Mahavir Harina Vanasthali National Park, Nov 14, 2021

Text: Sagarika Melkote; Photos: Dr G Samuel Sukumar

Blackbuck

With Covid waning across the country, we at Deccan Birders couldn't wait to resume our monthly outdoor trips. However, the most important thing was to tread with care, which meant avoiding crowds, using masks and practicing social distancing. With all this in mind, we decided to go somewhere nearby.

The Mahavir Harina Vanasthali National Park at Vansthalipuram seemed to beckon. Spread over an area of approximately 15 kilometres, the park is home to the endangered Blackbuck, besides other mammals. It is fairly thickly wooded with some small water bodies within the park.

The weather was not the usual for the month of November. Due to the heavy rains in Tamil Nadu, the sky was somewhat overcast and the sun was playing hide and seek with the clouds. Undeterred, twenty of us arrived in quick succession at the gates of the park. Though not a great day for birding weather-wise, we decided to explore the park. Considering there were about five people who were newcomers, the old timers could only hope for a reasonably good birding experience. We were also joined by two young pre-teen birders – it was nice to see them on the occasion of Children's Day! The newbies were full of enthusiasm and raring to go, and we sincerely hoped they would not be disappointed. As it turned out, we needn't have worried. Despite the climate, we did spot about 25 species, albeit mostly the usual suspects.

Black-headed Ibis

A lone Blackbuck greeted us as soon as we entered the gates of the park.

The local person, who had been instructed to accompany us, first led us to a water body. Though it was a small one, it had a bund on one side. A lone Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) was rummaging along the bund. Just then, we spotted its cousins – a flock of Glossy Ibises (*Plegadis falcinellus*) flying in the sky.

Indian Pond Heron

Shikra

Indian Pond Herons (*Ardeola grayii*) and assorted Egrets were standing in the water, their gaze intently fixed on the surface of the pond. White-throated Kingfishers (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) called and swooped in and out of the water, and a Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) perched briefly on a branch before, presumably, moving on to better things in life.

White-throated Kingfisher

A couple of raucous Black Drongos (*Dicrurus macrocercus*) were squabbling over something known only to them, and a Little Cormorant (*Microcarbo niger*) made an appearance. Grey (*Motacilla cinerea*) and White-browed (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*) Wagtails on the opposite bank were engaged in doing what they do best – wagging their tails. A surprise entrant was a female Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*), which kept flitting in and around the bushes that lined the shores of the water bodies. Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) and Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*) were, of course, in full attendance as were some House Crows (*Corvus splendens*). The first-time birders were entranced by the whole scene. Anita Negi, one of the senior birders, kept them engaged with tips on spotting and identifying. The camaraderie was wonderful – to share and to learn – factors which make the group so cohesive. Birds of a feather flock together? Yes, spot on, I'd say!

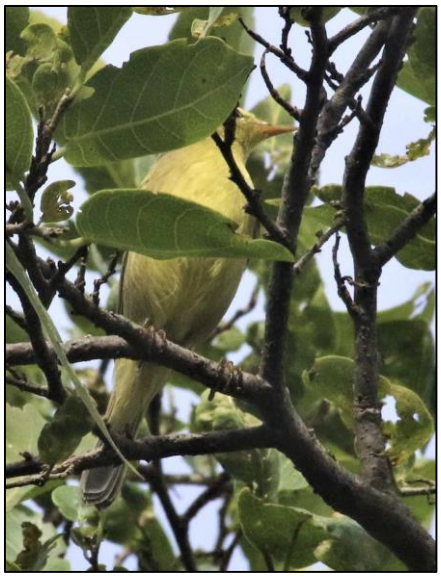
Indian Grey Hornbill

Moving on, we spotted Indian Grey Hornbills (*Ocyceros birostris*), yet more Bee-eaters, Bulbuls, Sunbirds, a few Plum-headed Parakeets (*Psittacula cyanocephala*) and a couple of Spotted Doves (*Spilopelia chinensis*) in flight.

Little Grebe & Common Moorhen

The second water body, too, did not disappoint. A Taiga Flycatcher (*Ficedula albicilla*) was flitting about. Little Grebes (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) and Common Moorhens (*Gallinula chloropus*) made their entrance. A few Indian Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) were swimming there as well. More Intermediate (*Ardea intermedia*) and Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) were foraging in the water. The water body was unusual – it looked more like a mangrove, with tree trunks sticking out of the water. We found a lot of peafowl feathers along the paths.

The call of a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) beckoned and had some of us in hot pursuit. However, much to the disappointment of those who were hoping to see it for the first time, it did not make an appearance. It seemed like the bird was in a mischievous mood that morning, for we heard its call for the second time as we proceeded up the path. It seemed to emanate from a bamboo clump, but we had no luck spotting the bird. The neighbouring trees had a bunch of warblers flitting about, but these restless birds did not sit still for even a moment, making it impossible to identify them. But we were well compensated by the sighting of a Sulphur-bellied Warbler (*Phylloscopus griseolus*), which obliged us by staying still long enough for Anita to identify it.



Sulphur-bellied Warbler

Cassia auriculata

Calliandra haematocephala

The park definitely merits another visit. It offers diverse habitat in the form of tall trees, wooded areas, bushes and water bodies. There is also a good variety of butterflies and mammals. According to their website, the park is home to about eighty species of migratory birds. Surprisingly, most of the usual species like Babblers, Prinias, Shrikes and Robins were conspicuous by their absence that day – possibly the weather did not draw them out. In spite of this, the enthusiasm of the first-time birders was infectious and the interactions that followed were animated.

Rhesus Macaque

Common Mormon

The full list of birds seen during the trip is given below:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	14	Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*
2	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	15	Common Coot	*Fulica atra*
3	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*	16	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*
4	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*	17	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
5	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	18	Taiga Flycatcher	*Ficedula albicilla*
6	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*	19	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*
7	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticua*	20	Intermediate Egret	*Ardea intermedia*
8	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	21	Sulphur-bellied Warbler	*Phylloscopus griseolus*
9	Black Redstart (Female)	*Phoenicurus ochruros*	22	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*
10	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*	23	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	*Cyornis tickelliae*
11	Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*	24	Paddyfield Pipit	*Anthus rufulus*
12	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptis ruficollis*	25	Spotted Dove	*Spilopelia chinensis*
13	Common Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*			

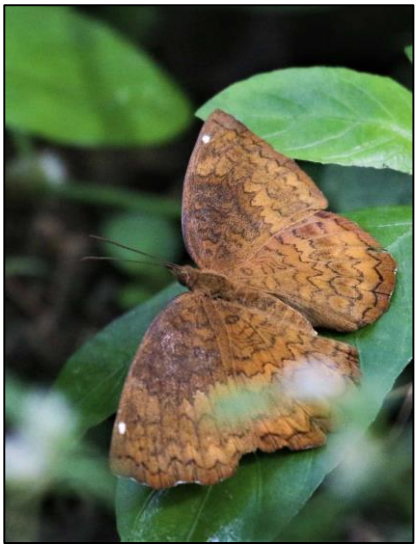
Some other photos taken during the trip:

Wanderer

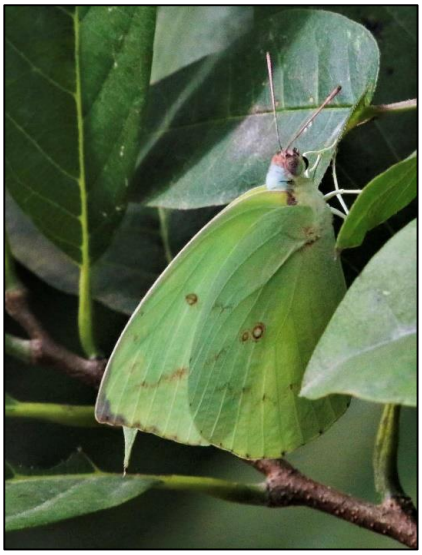
Striped Tiger

Psyche

Blue Tiger



Angled Castor



Emigrant

Common Gull

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Bird Humour

Umesh Mani

(Received on WhatsApp, October 21, 2021)

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)

Glossy Ibis breeding (L) and non-breeding (R) (Marakkanam, Tamil Nadu, January 15, 2022)

Order: Pelecaniformes
Family: Threskiornithidae
Genus: *Plegadis*
Species: *P. falcinellus*
Size: 55-65 cm

Description & distribution: The Glossy Ibis is the most widespread member of Threskionithidae, the family of Ibises and Spoonbills. Its Latin name derives from the ancient Greek word *plegados* and the Latin *falcis*, both of which mean 'sickle' and refer to the distinctive shape of the bill.

The breeding Glossy Ibis is mostly deep chestnut-maroon – dark enough for the bird to appear almost black from a distance or in poor light – and the wing coverts show glossy metallic green, bronze and purple tones. The long legs can vary from olive-grey to dark brown. The long bill is brownish-grey, lores are bare and delineated by a thin cobalt-blue, bluish-grey or white line. Non-breeding birds show a dark brown neck and head with white streaking. The sexes are alike. Juvenile birds are similar to adult non-breeding birds, but are dark brown with white mottling on the head, and only a faint gloss on the upperparts. In flight, it shows a graceful, sleek appearance with outstretched slender neck, and legs and feet projecting well beyond the tail.

The Glossy Ibis is a very widespread species, and breeds in warm regions across Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and New Zealand, as well as the Atlantic and Caribbean regions of the Americas. European populations winter in Africa and sometimes in parts or Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent; in North America, birds from the northern parts winter further south. In India, the species is generally considered migratory, though there is a resident population in western India, and possibly also in other parts. It is also seen in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Habitat & behaviour: The Glossy Ibis is usually seen in flocks in marshes at the margins of lakes and rivers, and also in *jheels*, lagoons, flood plains, swamps, reservoirs, sewage areas, irrigated farmland and paddy fields, mud flats and salt pans. It forages in very shallow water, using its long curved bill to probe in mud, soil or water for its prey. Its diet is eclectic and includes fish, amphibians, lizards, small snakes, aquatic insects, molluscs and crustaceans.

In flight, flocks tend to fly in V-formation. Its calls include a variety of croaks and grunts, and a hoarse or bleating *grrr* during breeding.

Nesting: The Glossy Ibis breeds between April and July, in colonies along with various other herons, storks and ibises. The typical nest is a platform of twigs and vegetation, and is built on emergent vegetation, low trees or bushes, at least 1m above the water or ground. The usual clutch consists of 2-3 eggs, blue-green in colour. Incubation duties are shared by both parents.

Local name: The Glossy Ibis is known as *'Kawari'* or *'Chhota baza'* in Hindi, *'That kankanam'* in Telugu, *'Chemban ibis'* in Malayalam, *'Karuppu kottan'* or *'Anthril paravai'* in Tamil and *'Nani kankanasar'* in Gujarati.

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